

István Apáthy's Heritage at the University of Szeged

To speak about István Apáthy's heritage and influence at the Universities of Szeged, is an honouring, but sad task. It is honouring to talk of the influence of a man, who is called the greatest microtechnician of his age, to whose institute in Kolozsvár researchers from all over the world went as if on a pilgrimage. The importance of his discoveries concerning the structure and functions of the neurons and neurofibrils, his partial results can really be appreciated perhaps only in our modern age. It may be honouring and seemingly easy to talk about a scientist of such excellence. To appreciate his human greatness, his dedication to noble causes, the fact that he realized so early that in the Danube Valley only the cultivation of national consciousness and simultaneously, the mutuality of harmonious relations between the nations and nationalities can ensure peaceful existence. It is also easy to speak of the fact that the nation never had an abundance of scientists so susceptible to the new, but at the same time almost fanatically thorough, striving at perfection and demanding, as he was.

Also for this reason it is a sad thing that for a long time he was ignored. After his death there was hardly anybody at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences willing to take upon himself the task of giving an address at his funeral. By the side of his grave Gyula Juhász called him the "Great Loner"; for 60 years his name had hardly been mentioned. Although our universities, among them the University of Szeged, treated him more fairly, in the light of this review our commemoration is a sad one, for of him, too, we can say what we have already had to say once, mentioning the lost possibilities of scientific careers finished too early, lamenting over what more this great personality, who was too soon lost or not duly appreciated, could have achieved, what he could have given to science and his nation. Of course, all such considerations are unscientific and unhistorical, because we do not really know what would have happened if Apáthy's life had not finished at the age of 59; if at the age of 58, physically and psychologically ill, fate had not confronted him with the task of creating for the third time and out of nothing a real workplace and an institute. But, however, unhistorical and thought may be, it is certain that Hungarian and Universal science, and also the past of our University became poorer by the fact that he was given approximately only one academic year's time in Szeged. He could spend only an unfortunately short time in our town, at our University; the academic year of 1921–1922 only. Although he was ill, it was at this time that the Zoological Institute was established, and its work started.

Our University – the two Universities of Szeged – were perhaps fairer to the memory of Apáthy than fate and science. Not only because – to use Gábor

Kolozsvári's words – “the physicians respect in Apáthy the great Hungarian genius more than the zoologists do.” Not only because a large number of the pupils of the University of Szeged carried on the torch lit by him, such as József Baló, Sándor Bálint, József Gelei, István Gyórfy, Albert Gellért, Béla Farkas, Ferenc Kiss and many others; but hardly exaggerate if I say that the first teachers, instructors of the natural science and medical faculties of the University of Szeged came more or less under his influence. Besides this also in the decades when his name was not even mentioned, the first students' hostel or dormitory of the then still undivided University of Szeged, the first such professionally separated student hostel assumed the name of Apáthy 41 years ago, on May 4, 1947. Today, when we are slowly getting used to appreciating the past more subtly, it is worth-while to underline that after the Liberation, in the period of the network of student hostel for the sons and daughters of the people organized at the higher education institutions and secondary schools, it was the medical students who gave the name of Apáthy to their student hostel and the student hostel has preserved the name of Apáthy through all the changes and storms of the past four decades. In 1967 **the Medical University of Szeged founded an Apáthy commemorative medal and prize, which since then is awarded every year to one or two students**, who have done exemplary work in studies, written papers based on independent research and have been active in the scientific students' circle.

On the other hand, it is also true that many students have passed their study time scarcely knowing who the eponym of the building was, and neither the 50th anniversary of his death nor the 100th anniversary of his birth was befittingly commemorated.

Today, when we consider it so important that the university publish its own scientific work in suitable form and with valuable content, we cannot sufficiently appreciate Apáthy's personal merit in that in 1921, in no better economic circumstances than ours, he founded the periodical **Acta literarum ac scientiarum**, which in spite of many modifications and alterations, still exists and to some extent continues the traditions of Apáthy.

We are living the days of doing historical justice. It is an extraordinary honor to our University as well as to myself that we can help raise the honor of this eminent predecessor to its proper rank. How do we see the memory of István Apáthy, how can his heritage be defined for our University?

The noble memories of our traditions are turning to dust. This is the case not only with the churches, gates and folk customs in Székely land, but also in the domain of the true values of Universal and Hungarian sciences, the cultivation of its traditions: much has been disturbingly and regrettably neglected.

We must get rid of the way of thinking that reckons everything – even chronology – from the appearance of this or that person or his successes, often with a century belatedness. We must go ahead not on the moldering bones and memory of our predecessors, but by timely appreciation of their advice and hard work and with their intellectual and moral support.

Just consider how much wisdom shines through in Apáthy's words pronounced in 1904: “... We have rewarded the relatively good in the work of our students, in order to stimulate them to strive to attain the absolute good.” Still more timely are his following words: “I would like to awake in the Hungarian nation especially the self-confidence that should not allow us even in the domain of science to be content with the relatively good, but should demand the absolutely good there, too ...”. Or let us quote his similarly wise thought: “Our compatriots should not tell us again and

again that we are a small nation because we are grappling with many difficulties, nor can we compete with the great nations of the West in the solution of scientific problems. In the domain of science there is nothing in the way of our success. The number of thinking ganglion cells in the human brain does not depend on how populous the nation is one belongs to."

"A nation can become great in several ways. We should follow the path that our natural forces can cope with. Such is the path of science. I trust that the Hungarian nation will sometime lead the cultured nations in the field of science and arts ..."

As Rector of the University of Kolozsvár, he concluded the prize-awarding ceremony of the University with these words: „Ahead on the road of the science into the ranks of the first! And — as for devotion —: follow me!"

His rector's address at the academic year-opening ceremony in the fall of 1903 is topical without any comment: "The universities today have two tasks: one of them is to advance science on the way of finding out new truths, the other is to present the scientific results by means of teaching.

The university is the more truly a university the more it serves — with its full equipment, organization and the public spirit of its members, teachers and students — the first task, the discovery of new truths. And the more truly it is a university, the more it directs teaching to the advancement of science by putting new workers in the place of the old ones, and by putting many workers in the place of a few. On the other hand, the university degrades itself to a vocational school the more, the less opportunity it offers to its members for the advancement of science. The university is the less a university, the more it forces the instructors to teach only those scientific facts that are needed daily for our existence, but it should teach with full sacrifice of its time again and again all that people may need in everyday life.

By what I have just said I do not to disparage the education provided by the professional schools. Thorough and for eligible people easily available professional school education is just as necessary to the prosperity and material well-being of a nation as participation in the enrichment of international science by finding out new scientific facts and by further development of existing ones.

But it would be of course, a sin to compel an inspired sculptor to hew building stones, and it would be unjust to blame for his work the honest stonemason whom we ourselves have forced to carve statues for our national heroes. It would be similarly wrong to burden the scientist grappling with new scientific problems with the teaching of beginners, who — perhaps because the scientist may be an inferior teacher — do not even understand him. It would also be wrong to blame the well-prepared specialist and good teacher because he does not take part in the advancement of science, when his abilities are not in that line.

Our university system is the very unhappy marriage of a woman who in her soul likes to walk among the stars but whose husband demands from her all her time for cleaning vegetables for cooking and for ironing linen. The weaker side, the woman, is the university spirit; the stronger, and always grumbling man is the vocational school trend. They must separate from bed and board to make their life tolerable.

Honest, unselfish endeavor is needed, but appreciation and remuneration are also necessary; not to stimulate the scientist to work or to go on working, for he needs no stimulation or remuneration, but to encourage also such people to try to become scientist as are not yet scientists, but have the capability to become scientists. No one is born a scientist, only perhaps curious. Scientific research becomes a passion in one who has learned it, and could learn it only at the price of

hard work. The alluring example is needed by the talented person, for otherwise only the ability to wait can help our successors to get a chair.

But for the greatness of the university it is not only necessary that its professors and instructors be scientists; it is just as necessary that the students of the university be thirsty for science. So long as in the desks and laboratories of the university, everybody is only after the diploma, there will be no true university life, our university will not be really great"

Apáthy's example, fate, and life teach us that scientific results, true scientific success can be achieved only by a sense for the new, fanatically thorough and careful activity and continuous watching of the world, and human and scientific contacts knowing no formal bounds or limitations. Apáthy took the lead in teaching his coworkers and pupils in this spirit and also in considering the science of the world, the whole body of human knowledge, his life element and so practically taught the inseparability of true patriotism and internationalism at a time when the conditions of transport and mass communication were incomparably poorer than today.

We must not only preserve and cultivate his memory piously, but really befittingly, so that we keep in evidence the lessons of his life, his successes, failures and career as an instructive example in our daily work, in our long-range goals, and in the formulation and formation of our behavior.

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